SITE Santa Fe stands close to the downtown historic district of the city, beside train tracks and Warehouse 21, a haven for artistic youth. Contextualized by a landscape that originally belonged (and still partially belongs) to Native Americans, within the architectural residue of a complex colonial and missionary history, the Southwest reverberates with the fantasy of an American frontier that still, to this day, stutters in contemporary consciousness. This framework makes SITE a tuning fork for sociopolitical discussions of US heritage. It is therefore fitting that the institution would tackle the mythos of America and American identity; acknowledging the rich and complex layers of nostalgia and violence endemic to the region, while teasing out the beauty endemic to the region, while teasing out the rich and complex layers of nostalgia and identity; acknowledging the beauty of the Southwest, and ultimately resist constraint. SITElines.2016: New Perspectives on SITE Santa Fe’s 2016 exhibition, much wider than a line, is part of an ongoing biennial series, SITElines: New Perspectives on Art from the Americas. — Within the latest iteration of this vision, past and present converge through the juxtaposition of historic documentation and newly commissioned artworks, just as conceptions of North, South, and Middle America mash up throughout the show. With over thirty-five artists from eleven countries, much wider than a line presents the entire American continent as a stage upon which individual artists interrogate, refute, and ultimately resist constraint. To establish that premise, the first room of the exhibition is dedicated to Italian Architect, Paolo Soleri’s historic outdoor Santa Fe Amphitheater (1960–present). Completed in 1970, and open until 2010, the theatre was designed to present Native American theater for the Institute of American Indian Arts (now located on the campus of the Santa Fe Indian School). Soleri’s theater design favors a multi-dimensional perspective; the stage is round with different floors for performers to act upon. Built from mud and concrete, with lean but curvilinear lines, that seem in and of themselves tied to late 60s visions for social and artistic change, the sky overhead becomes a participating agent as a result. As if to underscore the premise of which Soleri’s stage provides a platform for the exhibition at large, it is reproduced in multiple ways: a large-scale black and white photograph of the original structure is mounted to a wall, with an architectural addition of a bench that curves into the gallery space by New Mexico–based architect Conrad Skinner, flanked by a video documenting the theatre’s construction, a small wooden model in the middle of the room, a suite of elaborate notes composed by Soleri as he worked out his design, and beautifully composed instructions provided by Lloyd Kiva New, then-Director of the Institute of American Indian Arts. — In New’s vision, we read the considerations required by a theatrical tradition that is not connected to Ancient Greece or Shakespeare. “The drama would be non-scenic,” New writes, “in the sense that it would not at some time attempt to naturalistically create before the audience a specific locale through the use of scenery. The scenic means of this theater would be tied up in the use of costumes and properties both of which would then need to be elaborate and rich.” With this beginning, one cannot help but imagine an American theater, or art, less susceptible to Western European influence. Indeed, how many voices, poetics, and artistic languages ought to be unearthed in seeking out a true, American aesthetic? — In the next room, across from Argentinean artist Marta Minujín’s Comunicando con Tierra (1976)—a large net-like structure formed out of soil from both the historic Inca site...
History is the play. We just happen to be a part of it.

(2014–present), a series of different original musical recordings translated to their affiliated scores, each created as part of the Native American Composers Apprenticeship Project, an outreach program that the artist works on with high school students to draw on their varied influences—tribal music, rap music, videogame soundtracks, or nature. São Paulo-based artist Erika Verzutti installs a series of objects in Commissioned work (Cemetery with Snow) (2015) that stand in an organized huddle, waiting like props, while fashion designer and artist historian, Carla Fernandez’s series of cotton and hand-woven capes made with artisan collaborators—pencils made with Indigenous weavers—hang nearby like costumes not yet in use. Visitors are invited to try on the garments, reminding you visitors are actors and the narrative is taking place, by accident almost, between the constellation of artworks. History is the play. We just happen to be a part of it. —

Thankfully, no single American aesthetic is resolved within the exhibition’s stage. Nor should it try to be. Nothing is purely itself. Not in the politics of an Indian Theater—an art form that had to be unearthed and rediscovered after the US Government’s genocidal efforts. Not in Zacharias Kunuk’s astonishingly beautiful screening of Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner (2001), the first feature length film written, directed, and acted in the Inuit language, nor in Jeffrey Gibson’s Like a Hammer (2016), where the artist performs by painting text works wearing a robe adorned with metal jangles, the garment and two-dimensional pieces hanging in the space—instead there is a constant interactive excavation that destabilizes notions of authenticity, while amplifying the diverse and promiscuous layers of cultural influence. Much wider than a line and into the promised American identity, highlighting a complex intersection of legacies, languages, politics, and architectures.

— SITE Santa Fe, much wider than a line, runs through January 8, 2017.

OPPOSITE TITLE PAGE:
Zacharias Kunuk (b. 1957 in Cape Dorset, Nunavut, Canada; lives and works in Igloolik, Nunavut, Canada)

Amosnsuk (The Fast Runner), 2001
Film, 2 hours 54 minutes
Courtesy of the artist

PENNSYLVANIA: Paolo Soldini (b. 1939, Torin, Italy; died 2013), Paradis Valley, AZ
An episodic c. 1970
Commissioned for the Library of Congress for Institute of American Indian Arts, 1964
Image courtesy of the ISA Archives, Santa Fe —

RIGHT:
Raemon Chaim (b. 1977 in Fort Defiance, Navajo Nation, Arizona; lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico)
Native American Composers Apprentice Project, 2004-present
Workshop, scores and performance
Score for string quartet [excerpt], Celeste Lansing, Anu Vuorinen (2009)

BILMI:
Selected drawings from the series: The Cycle of the Maize Plants; Studies of Principal Trees in the Forest; Trees with legends; Drawings of Pineapples; Drawings of Cassavas and Other Tubers (2009), by Abel Rodriguez.

Courtesy of Tr Original International, Colombia CAP.

of Machu Picchu in Peru and Buenos Aires—vinita contain a slew of paperback publications underneath a wall of page layouts, featuring an installation of US poet Margaret Randall’s and Sergio Mondragon’s bilingual Mexico City journal, El Corzo Enamorado/The Plumed Horn (1982–1990), which integrated aesthetics and nationalities. As it appears here, the publications are at once tied to a specific historical moment and aesthetic, while appearing like playbills or a research library—concrete examples of an “American” (and bilingual) poetics that integrates Latin and South American literature, indigenous voices, jazz, Inca-inspired line drawings, European surrealists, and more.

Nearby, hang lush drawings by Colombian artist Abel Rodriguez, entitled Selected drawings from the series The Cycle of the Maloca Plants; Studies of Principal Trees in the Forest with Legends; The Cultivated Plants of the Center People; Drawings of Pineapples; Drawings of Cassavas and Other Tubers (2009–2016)—some framed, others pinned to the wall, and others in vitrines. Among them are a series of twelve labor intensive pen and ink drawings of the same forest clearing at different times of year. Presented in this context, they look like sketches for a set design. And yet, a reaping central brown hat is the most static and prop-like, whereas the surrounding trees, with their variously shifting foliage, seem like, whereas the surrounding trees, with their variously shifting foliage, seem static and props, while fashion designer and artist historians, Carla Fernandez’s series of cotton and hand-woven capes made with artisan collaborators—pencils made with Indigenous weavers—hang nearby like costumes not yet in use. Visitors are invited to try on the garments, reminding you visitors are actors and the narrative is taking place, by accident almost, between the constellation of artworks. History is the play. We just happen to be a part of it. —